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FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6076
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1869
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE

UNCLAS BRIDGETOWN 000089

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [VE](#) [DO](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: DOMINICANS CONCERNED ABOUT ALBA

REF: BRIDGETOWN 62

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: While the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica (GOCD) defends its decision to join Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), many sectors in Dominican society are concerned about the long-term consequences of this agreement. The decision to halt progress on the oil refinery is the first sign that Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit seems to value domestic public opinion over Chavez's. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Consistent in conversations PolOff had with students, members of the business sector, tourism investors, and other members of society is a concern of what ALBA is and what it means for Dominica. Fears include ALBA negatively impacting foreign direct investment and income from tourism dollars. Others worry that the USG will tighten visa policy against Dominicans in retaliation of ALBA. Some worry there is truth in Chavez's claims that ALBA is an anti-U.S. military alliance. Generally, the populace mostly wants a statement from Skerrit explaining what ALBA is and why Dominica joined.

¶3. (SBU) In private conversations, GOCD representatives explained to PolOff that ALBA is not a military alliance, but simply a trade and development strategy (reftel). These same representatives claimed that Skerrit will release a statement any day now and include a copy of the signed agreement with the statement.

¶4. (U) Those concerned with ALBA also tend to disagree with the ALBA-funded oil refinery that Chavez has promised Dominica. They see the USD 80 million refinery as a glaring eyesore in Dominica's marketing as the Nature Isle of the Caribbean. Even if the refinery could be made environmentally sound, various members of the investment and tourism communities protested that the existence of the refinery is against the spirit of the Nature Isle plan and will put off potential tourists and investors.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Skerrit remains a charismatic and likeable politician. However, ALBA has eroded his strong popularity among the populace. Recent actions from the PM's office hint that he recognizes this. Immediately following the January 25 ALBA conference in Venezuela, Skerrit met with private sector representatives to explain ALBA and his reasons for joining. On February 12, he announced that Dominica would put its ALBA-sponsored oil refinery on hold. These actions support the idea that Skerrit is a pragmatist concerned with the economic growth of Dominica. Although sizeable foreign assistance from Chavez speaks loudly, the concerns of his electorate, particularly within the private sector, may speak louder.

